

MARCUS CHENG (1884–1963) AND CHINESE PNEUMATOLOGY¹

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Introduction

In the spring of 2010, while browsing through a collection of old magazines in his school’s journal room in downtown Toronto, a young seminarian encountered a curious editor’s note:

Yesterday [October 14, 1948] we had a visit from Rev. Marcus Cheng who is head of the Seminary in Chungking, China. This new school is seeking to train Chinese pastors and workers, in in [*sic*] the capital of the country, for work amongst their own people. To a lamentable extent seminaries in China are Modernist. This is a thoroughly evangelical school which seeks, as far as possible, to work indigenously. Mr. Cheng told something of his school, to the great interest to all. After lunch he addressed the Missionary Fellowship, to whom he related a number of his own spiritual experiences.²

This brief note marked my first encounter with Marcus Cheng (1884–1963), also known as Chen Chonggui. It was striking not only because Cheng was the first Chinese pastor to have visited my alma mater but also because it raised the intriguing question of what sort of “spiritual experiences” he might have shared with the Baptist seminarians in Toronto.³ Indeed, the notion of *ling-*

1. The author wishes to express gratitude to Drs. Alexander Chow and John Sampson, for their encouragement and feedback. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this article are mine.

2. Brown, “Among Ourselves,” 18.

3. In the student magazine, *The Seminarian*, it was recorded: “Mr. [Marcus] Cheng used the story of the Chungking Theological Seminary to illustrate the open door that is before the Christian worker in China today. The school was founded about four years ago at the request of Christian university

xing (靈性, “spiritual matters”) appears to have been among Cheng’s central theological concerns—if not one of his signature emphases.⁴ For Cheng, worldly matters were inseparable from their spiritual dimensions: “Besides political and economic reasons, the poverty of our country is most importantly caused by moral and spiritual reasons.”⁵ National salvation, in his view, could therefore be realized through evangelism—by leading people to accept the gospel and repent of their sins.

Cheng’s preoccupation with spiritual renewal reflected both his public engagement with the pressing question of his time—“How can China be saved?”—and the influence of the global

students. Many of these students had found the Lord as the result of a revival that swept through the Chinese colleges . . . The enrolment there this year is eighty-two students of whom nineteen are women. Mr. Cheng remarked that this was the same proportion as the Toronto Baptist Seminary and moreover it was just the right proportion!” (“Chapel Talks,” 7). See also Cheng, *Echoes from China; Escape from Singapore; After Forty Years*. On Toronto Baptist Seminary, see *By his Grace to his Glory*; Rawlyk, “A. L. McCrimmon.”

4. For instance, in 1929, the *True Light* magazine published letters from Marcus Cheng and Wang Mingdao (1900–1991) to Chang Wenkai (1871–1931), the magazine’s editor. In Cheng’s brief letter (dated August 29, 1929), he asked for Chang Wenkai’s permission to reprint some of the “spiritual messages” from the *True Light* in his *Evangelism* (佈道雜誌) magazine. Curiously, Cheng employed the term *ling* (靈) five times, among which he used *chun-ling* (純靈, “pure spirit”) and *shu-ling* (屬靈, “belong to the spirit” or “spiritual”) to describe their publishing ministries and asked for the Holy Spirit’s guidance that they may gain the hope to “glorify God and save people” through these two periodicals (求聖靈引導, 俾得榮神救人為盼) (“Letter”). In contrast, besides mentioning his *Spiritual Food Quarterly* (靈食季刊) twice, Wang Mingdao rarely employed any spiritual terminologies in his letter (“Letter”). For Cheng, the core issue of the world is spiritual in nature. Thus, he pointed out, “Besides political and economic reasons, the poverty of our country is most importantly caused by moral and spiritual reasons” (see Chen, *Only Jesus*, 139). National salvation, therefore, could be achieved through evangelism, making people accept the gospel and repent their sins. The Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil Wars led Cheng to perceive God’s will within the collective suffering of the nation, as these sufferings deepened his understanding of the tension between Chinese nationalism and the kingdom of God. For instance, see Cheng, “Spirituality,” 5; “Christianity and Resistance,” 12; “China after the War,” 5–8; “Kingdom,” 18–20.

5. Chen, *Only Jesus*, 139.

Holiness Movement. Among his theological and pastoral contemporaries, Cheng articulated perhaps the most comprehensive and contextually grounded pneumatology within the conservative Evangelical framework. His theology of the Holy Spirit thus represents a significant expression of mainstream Evangelical discourse, revealing both a fervent charismatic impulse in early Republican China and the far-reaching influence of the Holiness Movement.

With the exception of Professor Ying Fuk-Tsang's seminal study, Marcus Cheng's *Studies of the Holy Spirit* (1933) has received little scholarly attention.⁶ Yet this work remains the only book-length, systematic treatment of pneumatology by a Chinese theologian of the period. To extend Ying's research, the present article examines Cheng's pneumatology as articulated in *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, situating it within the broader development of Chinese Christian theology in the early 1930s.

A Brief Biographical Sketch

Marcus Cheng was born in the winter of 1884 in Macheng (麻城), Hubei province, into a poor family.⁷ His father, a cooper by

6. Ying, *Praxis and Predicament*, 98–109.

7. Cheng indicated that he was born in "Mucheng," where the Swedish Missionary Society (SMF) also began their work in China (Cheng, *Echoes from China*, 7). Due to Cheng's unique spelling, "Macheng" was difficult to identify. For instance, he explained that both his father's mother and mother's mother migrated from Anhui province due to flood. However, he spelled Anhui as "Nganhuei." For the majority of scholars, Wuchang, which is now a district of Wuhan, has been identified as Cheng's birthplace (see Wang and Lei, "Chen Chonggui"). Others, such as James Shih-Chieh Cha and Li Yading, identified it as Jingzhou (see Cha, *Concise Biographies*, 148; Li, "Chen Chonggui"). Daniel Bays, however, only stated that Cheng was born in Hubei province "close to Wuhan" ("Foreign Missions," 147). Cheng pointed out that his family operated a cooper shop in Hankou, where his elder brother was born. When the business declined, they moved to "Mucheng," which is about 125 kilometres northeast of today's Wuhan, whereas Jingzhou is more than 220 kilometres west of Wuhan. Furthermore, according to R. G. Tiedemann, "The first SMF missionaries entered Wuchang in 1890, and a house was rented in Songpu, Macheng Xian, but the missionaries Wickholm and Johanson were killed by local people

trade, later joined the American Episcopal Church.⁸ This conversion, however, caused familial tension, as Cheng's grandfather, favouring his younger son, forced Cheng's immediate family to become financially independent, leaving them with limited resources.⁹ Despite these constraints, Cheng's parents saved enough to send their older son to a private school. As Cheng later called, "If the Mission Covenant had not opened a Boys' School in Wuchang," where tuition was free, he would have been deprived of an education.¹⁰ Beginning at the age of six, Cheng studied Chinese classics, Christian literature, and various liberal arts subjects. The Swedish Missionary Society (*Svenska Missionsförbundet* [SMF]) exerted a lasting impact on the family's spiritual formation—Cheng's mother later experienced conversion, his father transferred his membership to the SMF church, and Cheng was baptized in 1900.

In 1901, Cheng commenced his studies at Wesley College (博文書院) in Wuchang, an institution founded by the British Methodists, with the financial support of the SMF. After two years, however, the Mission Covenant Church discontinued its sponsorship out of concern that Cheng might "not serve the mission when I graduated, but use my English to earn money in other fields of work."¹¹ With the assistance of an American benefactor introduced by Principal Gilbert G. Warren (1861–1927), Cheng was able to complete his education.¹² Following graduation, Cheng served the SMF for one year before taking a position

soon afterwards" (*Reference Guide*, 222). Thus, Jingzhou and Wuhan are not Cheng's birthplace.

8. Cheng stated that his father joined the church through a friend, but he did not tell his own father (*Echoes from China*, 9).

9. Cheng, *Echoes from China*, 15.

10. Cheng, *Echoes from China*, 14.

11. Cheng, *Echoes from China*, 23.

12. Gilbert G. Warren was born at Exeter in 1861. After his theological training, Warren came to China under the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1886. He served in Hubei province and became the principal of Wesley College for a short time. He then went to Hunan and arrived in Changsha in May 1900. He was not able to settle in Changsha until 1902, where he spent the rest of his life and served the Union Theological College (see "Obituary Notes").

teaching English at a government school to support his family. Around this period, he married Zhou Yanchun (周豔春), but the marriage was tragically brief, as Zhou died suddenly in the summer of 1906, only six months after their wedding.

His loss plunged Cheng into what he later described as a “great crisis”—“I did not . . . clearly and definitely know God, much less did I trust and obey Him.”¹³ In October 1906, he attended revival meetings led by Dr. Lee Shu-ching (李叔青, 1875–1908), whose preaching deeply moved him.¹⁴ After consulting with Lee, Cheng prayed to invite “the Lord Jesus Christ dwelling in the heart as Lord and King.”¹⁵ Through this experience of renewal, Cheng felt a decisive call to Christian ministry—a vocation he had previously promised but not pursued. Despite familial opposition and personal hesitation, he resolved to enter the ministry in early 1907, particularly after reading the biography of George Müller (1805–1898).¹⁶

Cheng’s ministerial career may be divided into several distinct phases. From 1906 to 1925, he served under the SMF and held the position of the first Chinese lecturer at Kingchow Seminary, established largely as a result of SMF founder Paul Petter Waldenström’s (1838–1917) visit to China.¹⁷ Though lacking

13. Cheng, *After Forty Years*, 2, 7.

14. On Lee, see Wu, *Dr Lee*.

15. Cheng, *After Forty Years*, 3; *Echoes from China*, 29–30.

16. Cheng, *After Forty Years*, 7.

17. Kingchow Seminary was a collaborative effort between the Swedish and American Mission Covenant churches. When Paul Petter Waldenström (1838–1917), founder of the Swedish Mission Covenant Church, visited Wuchang in 1907, the missionaries agreed on the demand for a seminary. Cheng was sent to Europe to raise funds for the school. Though it was planned to have the seminary in Wuchang, it was decided to have it in Jingzhou. The school began its first semester in 1909 (see Lundbom, *On the Road to Siangyang*; Peterson, “Kingchow Theological Seminary”). Cheng married his second wife Li Zheyang (李哲映) in 1909 before moving to Jingzhou. According to his autobiography, Li went to school with Cheng’s sister and was a member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. After her education at a Methodist school, Li went and served as a teacher somewhere far from Macheng. When she visited Macheng, Li heard Cheng’s preaching and was told that Cheng “was tired of life and wished to die. She thought it a great pity

formal theological education, Cheng regarded his time at Jingzhou as a period of rigorous intellectual and spiritual formation, later remarking, “Jingzhou was my school of continuing education. I treated teaching as learning.”¹⁸ In 1920, after visiting Sweden and the US, Cheng pursued studies in philosophy at Wheaton College in Illinois, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1922—he was the college’s first Chinese graduate.¹⁹ Upon returning to China, he was ordained in Jingzhou and began conducting revival meetings both at the seminary and across the country. As Ying Fuk-Tsang has observed, Cheng’s ministerial focus gradually shifted during this period toward itinerant revival preaching, a calling that came to dominate his post-1922 work.²⁰

In June 1925, disagreements with foreign colleagues at the seminary prompted Cheng’s resignation. He subsequently accepted an appointment as chaplain to Marshal Feng Yuxiang (馮

that such a young man should lose interest in life” (Cheng, *Echoes from China*, 33). One night, Li visited Cheng and sought to counsel the troubled man. According to Cheng, “We talked about our spiritual experiences. I was surprised that she knew the deeper things in spiritual life, and we prayed together. Since then, I got a new inspiration and a new interest in life, and we often corresponded” (Cheng, *Echoes from China*, 35). Despite his unwillingness to remarry, Cheng prayed for a sign that if he could leave Wuchang, he would remarry. With the opportunities at the new Kingchow Seminary, Cheng married Li in early 1909.

18. For instance, in an autobiographical article published in 1947, Cheng indicated that he saw himself as a student (看自己是學生) while working tirelessly at the seminary. He explained, “I was deprived of school at a young age, and Jingzhou was my school of continuing education” (荊州是我的補習學校). He also said, “I treated teaching as learning” (Cheng, “These Forty Years,” 31). In twelve years, Cheng taught various courses in science, philosophy, theology, church history, world history, and Chinese history. While facing criticism, Cheng developed a habit of broad reading, as he explained, “My love toward Christ makes me love reading the Bible, which leave me to love reading all books about the Bible. For me, all books are relevant to the Bible, and I read all books through the lens of the Bible” (Cheng, “These Forty Years,” 32).

19. See “Cheng, Marcus, 1922.”

20. Ying, *Praxis and Predicament*, 59.

玉祥, 1882–1948), the so-called “Christian marshal.”²¹ Serving with Feng’s army, Cheng preached to the soldiers and baptized many.²² Although his chaplaincy lasted only two years, Cheng became one of Feng’s most ardent defenders and later his biographer—especially after rumors circulated that Feng had abandoned Christianity following his visit to the Soviet Union.²³ Cheng also faced his first life-threatening experience during the Nankou Campaign of 1926. When warlords Zhang Zuolin (張作霖, 1875–1928) and Wu Peifu (吳佩孚, 1874–1939) launched attacks against Feng, Cheng retreated with the defeated army and took refuge for more than one hundred days in the home of a European resident in Salaqi, near Baotou, Inner Mongolia.²⁴ During this anxious exile, Cheng composed *Daily Spiritual Exercises* (靈修日新), a work that later evolved into the influential periodical *Evangelism* (佈道雜誌).²⁵

The years 1928 to 1937 marked the height of Cheng’s influence and recognition. In 1927, he was appointed General Director of the Stewart Fund for Evangelical Work in China, based in Shanghai. Established in 1917 through donations from the Stewart brothers of Union Oil Company, the fund supported Bible colleges, short-term training programs, and Christian publications.²⁶ Around the same time, Cheng founded *Evangelism*.

21. Ying, *Praxis and Predicament*, 52–57. See also Bays, “Foreign Missions.” On Feng Yuxiang, see Ying, *Christian Doctrine*, 165–328; Mariani, “China’s ‘Christian General.’” For a critical study, see Wang, “History.”

22. For missionary depiction of Feng as a “Christian General,” see Goforth, *Chinese Christian Army*; Goforth and Goforth, *Miracle Lives*; Broomhall, *Marshal Feng*; Davis, *China’s Christian Army*. It is curious that, according to Wang Mingdao, Feng and Y. T. Wu (1893–1979) were the most famous unbelieving Christians. Wang recalled that when Feng was defeated in the Central Plains War (中原大戰) (1929–1930), he retreated to Taishan. At one Christian student meeting, Feng allegedly stated, “Some say I am not a Christian. This is incorrect. I am a Christian, but I do not believe God” (Wang, *Another Forty Year*, 22).

23. Cheng, *Marshal Feng*.

24. Cheng, “These Forty Years,” 33; Ying, *Praxis and Predicament*, 60.

25. Cheng, “These Forty Years,” 33.

26. See Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, 249–50; Blackstone, “Milton Stewart Evangelistic Funds.”

In April 1928, he represented China at the International Missionary Council in Jerusalem. Later that year, he joined the Hunan Bible Institute, where he served as dean of arts until 1936.²⁷ At Hunan, Cheng taught biblical studies and edited *Evangelism*, which became the school's official periodical and one of the most widely circulated Christian magazines of the Republican era.²⁸ During school recesses, he travelled extensively to preach at revival meetings across China, except in the northwest.²⁹ It was also during his tenure at Hunan that Cheng composed his *Studies of the Holy Spirit* (聖靈之研究), published by the institute in 1933—a seminal work representing the first systematic study of pneumatology by a Chinese theologian.

Chinese Pneumatology in Context

Before examining Cheng's contribution, it is necessary to situate his work within the broader development of pneumatological discourse among Chinese Protestants in the early twentieth century. According to the Chinese Periodical Database (CNBKSJ), the term "Holy Spirit" began appearing frequently in Christian periodicals by the 1920s, with a marked increase in publications addressing the Spirit after 1930. This growth occurred despite the simultaneous proliferation of Protestant periodicals—453 new titles between 1914 and 1937—indicating not merely an expansion of print culture but a heightened theological and devotional interest in the Spirit's work among Chinese Christians.³⁰

Prior to 1900, most writings focused on the Holy Spirit in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, a series of articles published in *Chinese Illustrated News* (書畫新報) in 1891 affirmed the Spirit's divinity while distinguishing the Spirit's "emanation" in terms of office rather than essence.³¹ These dis-

27. On Hunan Bible Institute, see Yao, "Servant to the Church"; "Hunan Bible Institute"; Hudson, "Beyond the Wall."

28. Cheng, "These Forty Years," 34.

29. Cheng, "These Forty Years," 34.

30. Ho, *Protestant Missionary Publications*.

31. Huaiding, "On the Trinity"; "On the Trinity: Four." Other examples are Xie, "On the Holy Spirit's Works"; Shen, "Lectures."

cussions were primarily doctrinal rather than experiential. Even during the revival movements of the early 1900s, references to the Spirit tended to be general appeals for divine aid rather than extended reflection on the Spirit's presence in the Christian life.³² One notable exception was an article in *True Light*, which linked receiving the Spirit with continual perseverance in faith, implicitly rejecting the idea of any deficiency of the Spirit in the believer.³³

Beginning in the 1910s and 1920s, however, discussions of the "second blessing"—the experience of being "filled with the Spirit" after conversion—began to appear. Mary F. Parmenter of the Christian and Missionary Alliance argued that without this second blessing, believers lacked the power necessary for Christian witness and service.³⁴ Her articulation helped shift Chinese discussions of the Holy Spirit from doctrinal affirmation to experiential transformation. Writers such as Wang Zai (1898–1975)—Watchman Nee's (1903–1972) colleague in his early ministry—continued this line of thought, emphasizing empowerment for ministry as the principal effect of Spirit-filling.³⁵

32. In the *Chinese Christian Intelligencer*, a weekly journal of the Presbyterian Missions in China, there were occasional articles requesting prayers for the Spirit's blessing in local churches. On revivals in China, see Bays, "Christian Revival"; Inouye, *China and the True Jesus*; Liu, *Global Pentecostalism*.

33. Guangren Yin (probably a pseudonym) made the connection between receiving the Holy Spirit and believing in Jesus Christ. Thus, he argued, "If the heart does not deviate from faith, the Holy Spirit does not depart from the heart" (心不離道。聖靈即不離心). In other words, the author rejected the notion of either the absence or deficiency of the Holy Spirit in Christian life (聖靈在我。非遠我。以固個人之道心) (see Yin, "On the Holy Spirit").

34. Parmenter, "On Believers Being Filled by the Holy Spirit," 63, who urged Christians to pursue the blessing of being filled by the Holy Spirit, because unless the Holy Spirit fills the heart and lords over life, Christians are unable to prove their unity in Christ. In other words, without the second blessing after conversion, converted believers are not fully Christians. In contrast, Spirit-filled Christians could know Christ, understand the Bible, conquer sins, genuinely love Jesus, make powerful witnesses, receive life, and know Jesus' second coming (66–67).

35. Wang, "Life"; "Filled by the Holy Spirit." Wang uniquely started with the person of the Holy Spirit and stated that the three persons of the God-

By the 1920s and 1930s, reflections on the Holy Spirit appeared not only in magazine articles but also in longer works, including Jia Yuming's systematic theology (1921) and Watchman Nee's *The Spiritual Man* (1928). Meanwhile, Wang Mingdao published translated essays on the Spirit in *Spiritual Food Quarterly*, where he criticized Pentecostal expressions he perceived as excessive, including the Shandong revival.³⁶ What emerges is a diverse spectrum of Chinese pneumatologies: Jia emphasized the Spirit's role in sanctification, framed within classical theology—largely due to his adaption of Augustus Hopkins Strong's (1836–1921) systematic theology; Nee developed a tripartite spiritual anthropology influenced by Keswick and inner-life theology; and Wang upheld the primacy of Scripture and warned against emotional or charismatic extremes, perhaps under the influence of more sober treatments of the spiritual movements found in the *True Light* magazine. It is within this evolving and contested field that Marcus Cheng's pneumatology must be located. His *Studies of the Holy Spirit* (1933) did not emerge in isolation, but as a deliberate attempt to articulate a balanced and biblically grounded response to these ongoing debates.

Cheng's Studies of the Holy Spirit (1933)

In the preface to *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, which was written on November 9, 1933, Cheng stated that his purpose was to elucidate the biblical teachings on the Holy Spirit at a time when

head were like the three knuckles of a finger (Wang, "To Be Filled," 56). See also Lü, "Studies." Since the second blessing brings empowerment in Christian life and service, like locomotive-driven trains, the second blessing is marked by passive reception by faith (Wang, "To Be Filled," 60). See Ng and Leung, "John Sung's Pneumatology"; Ireland, *John Song*; Wu, *Understanding Watchman Nee*; Ip, "Watchman Nee's Pneumatology"; Hui, "Pneumatology"; Zhao, "Is the Spiritual Man Pentecostal?"; Tien, "Spirituality and Authority."

36. Begun in the spring issue of 1929, Wang published Torrey's (1856–1928) book *How to Obtain Fullness of Power in Christian Life and Service* (see Torrey, *How to Obtain Fullness*). Later in 1932, Wang also published Robert C. MacQuilkin's (d. 1952) *What Is Pentecost's Message Today?* (See MacQuilkin, *What Is Pentecost's Message Today?*). On Wang Mingdao's criticism of the Shandong revival, see Wang, "Charismatic Movement."

many Christians in China were pursuing Spirit baptism and spiritual power, which for Cheng was a phenomenon of the “movement of the Spirit” in China.³⁷ The book adopts a devotional structure organized into thirty daily readings, each beginning with a biblical passage and concluding with a short prayer. The majority of the scriptural citations are taken from the New Testament (91 percent), with a significant concentration in the Acts of the Apostles (32 percent), the Gospel of John, and Romans (see Appendix 2). Besides the introduction, Cheng began each day with a biblical text and ended it with a short prayer. He also included three excursuses in the main text to explain the meaning and the means to be filled by the Spirit in details.³⁸

However, the work is more than devotional; it reflects Cheng’s distinctive approach to biblical interpretation. As Cheng emphasized in his later writings on hermeneutics, Scripture must be read with attention to historical background and grammatical meaning, but such study alone is insufficient. Because the Holy Spirit is the true author of Scripture, the meaning of the text can

37. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 1–2. For Cheng, the Scripture laid out a principle of testing (Matt 7:16), and he must use it to distinguish the works of the Holy Spirit from that of the evil spirits (1). Cheng did not address the difference between the Holy Spirit and the evil spirit here. Later, Cheng translated David Morrieson Panton’s (1870–1955) article (see Panton, “辨別諸靈”). Panton first published his article in May 1925 in his bi-monthly magazine *The Dawn, an Evangelical Magazine*. Panton was the minister of Surrey Chapel, Norwich, and his main source of information about the churches in China may come from Margaret Emma Barber (和受靈, 1866–1929), a member of Panton’s church and an independent missionary in Fuzhou. With her Plymouth Brethren teachings, Barber influenced Chinese Christian leaders such as Watchman Nee and Wang Zai. It was Barber who first introduced works by the Plymouth Brethren and the inner life movement to Watchman Nee. Ying noticed that he also saw Panton’s article published in *The China Fundamentalist (Praxis and Predicament, 106n69)*. While it is difficult to determine where Marcus Cheng encountered Panton’s article, it is significant to establish the link between Panton and Barber.

38. Two of these excursuses were based on his earlier article, Cheng, “Have You Received the Holy Spirit.” This article was first delivered as a speech at a retreat conference in Guling, Jiangxi province. The other excursus was a translation of Ruth Paxson’s (1889–1949) article “Be Filled with the Spirit” (see Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 49–56).

only be fully apprehended through the illumination of the Spirit in the believer's inward life.³⁹ Cheng described this process concretely as one in which hearing sermons, reading the Bible, and reflecting intellectually eventually stir the affections, leading to delight in truth and resolve to follow Christ. His understanding of "spiritual experience" therefore refers not to dramatic charismatic phenomena, but to an inner transformation centred on repentance and renewed obedience.

Cheng understood the contemporary "movement of the Spirit" in China as a response to the spiritual condition of the church.⁴⁰ While external pressures such as waves of anti-Christian movements affected Christian life, Cheng argued that the more urgent problem was the spiritual complacency of believers. As a result, people believed Chinese Christians were "westernised, and rarely do people see us being *Christon-ised*."⁴¹ To overcome this condition, the church required a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁴² Referring to Acts 2, Cheng urged Chinese Christians to pray for a "Chinese Pentecost," believing that revival followed crisis and that the Chinese church stood at a decisive historical moment, believing a spiritual earthquake was on its way.⁴³

Cheng emphasized that the Holy Spirit's work transforms believers into those who embody the life of Christ, becoming Christ's representatives, as Jesus' entire earthly ministry was to reveal the Father and the Holy Spirit to people.⁴⁴ For the first disciples, to know Jesus is to know the Holy Spirit, whose primary work is "not to comfort and protect, but to move, strengthen, teach, and direct people."⁴⁵ With the Spirit, Christians could fearlessly and powerfully engage in preaching, prayer, and social

39. See Cheng, "How to Study the Bible"; Zhao and Chen, "Research"; Zhao, "Unchangeable and Changeable"; Ying, "Inner Holiness"; Wan, "Competing Tensions"; Strandenæs, "Bible."

40. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 2, 4–6.

41. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 6.

42. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 7–8.

43. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 10, 12.

44. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 14.

45. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 15.

service.⁴⁶ It is curious that Cheng employed a masculine language and stated that the Holy Spirit is not like a mother who comforts her naughty children, but as a military general, as “religion is war, a venturesome service.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, as the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit came to replace Christ.⁴⁸ Whereas the incarnated Son was bound by his physical and spatial limits, the Holy Spirit can simultaneously dwell in everyone’s heart and occupy many bodies, so that the Spirit can think “through [the believer’s] mind, strengthens his will, move his emotions, and directs by his hands,” while not “destroying our personality and character.”⁴⁹ Cheng understood this as the “secret of piety” and the “power of service.”⁵⁰ Thus, the works of Jesus and the Holy Spirit are distinguished, as the latter came to finish Jesus’ “unfinished” salvific work and.⁵¹ Unlike progressive theologians such as Wu Leichuan (1870–1944), Xu Baoqian (1892–1944), and Y. T. Wu (1893–1979), Cheng believed that it is insufficient merely to admire Jesus’ character or to express affection for him; Christians must come to know and understand him through the transformative work of the Holy Spirit.⁵² Thus, to know Jesus is to have the indwelling Spirit, who “with one’s conscience witness that Jesus is Christ and God” (cf. 1 Cor 12:3).⁵³ Analogous to a vessel, the more believers are filled with the Spirit, the more fully the life of Christ is manifested within them.⁵⁴

Despite its pragmatic orientation, the second blessing is fundamentally directed toward the formation of the *imago Christi*, enabling believers to become “Jesus’ representatives, to live his

46. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 16.

47. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 16. See Blaschke, “Unrecognised Piety of Men”; Callum G. Brown, “Masculinity and Secularisation”; Pearson, “Gender.”

48. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 17.

49. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 17, 18.

50. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 18.

51. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 20–21.

52. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 21–22.

53. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 23.

54. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 23. For Cheng, the second blessing is for every Christian, instead of those who work in Christian ministries (*Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 33–34).

life, to manifest his spirit, and to complete his work,” thereby becoming truly “the people of Christ.”⁵⁵ For Cheng, this process of formation in Christ is miraculous in nature and can only be accomplished through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, believers must cultivate three dispositions—“glorifying Jesus,” “knowing the Holy Spirit,” and “praying in faith”—in order to receive the Spirit’s transformative work.⁵⁶ Yet, because the Spirit is portrayed as already waiting for believers to open their hearts, this understanding tends to render sanctification a predominantly passive, individualized, and pragmatically oriented undertaking.⁵⁷

Beginning on day fifteen, Cheng turned to the effects of the second blessing and specifically addressed the question of glossolalia. While acknowledging speaking in tongues as one possible sign of the second blessing, he emphasized that it functions primarily as prayer rather than proclamation or preaching.⁵⁸ Because glossolalia is an occasional gift, Cheng cautioned against excessive pursuit of it. He even cited a seminary principal of the Assemblies of God who affirmed that the true evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit is not speaking in tongues but the empowerment for ministry, particularly preaching and service.⁵⁹ Although not all believers are called to evangelize or preach publicly, Cheng encouraged all Christians to seek the second blessing and to rely on the Spirit’s power in their particular

55. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 35.

56. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 44.

57. Like justification, Cheng believed that sanctification is also by faith alone (*Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 75). Furthermore, there is an order of receiving the Spirit, which begins with knowing the facts about God’s promises and follows by believing these promises. The final step is to feel the filling of the Spirit as a fact (76). Here Cheng confirmed Andrew Murray’s (1828–1917) teaching as he later concluded by quoting Murray that Christians need to (1) “believe the blessing of being filled with the Holy Spirit;” (2) confess “I have never received or have lost it;” (3) “desire to be filled with the Spirit regardless of the price;” (4) “please to confess and renounce all sins that prevent the Holy Spirit;” and (5) “convince now to receive the filling of the Holy Spirit by faith” (*Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 98).

58. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 60.

59. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 61–62.

vocations, so that they may “bear witness to Jesus and lead others to faith” in the contexts of their daily work.⁶⁰ Returning to the evaluative criterion drawn from Matt 7:17–20, Cheng ultimately argued that the defining characteristic of the second blessing is the production of love. Drawing on Col 3:12–14, he linked this love directly to the presence of the Holy Spirit, contending that “without this love, the filling of the Spirit cannot endure.”⁶¹

Conclusion

Seen against the backdrop of revivalist longing, social upheaval, and theological contestation in Republican China, Cheng’s *Studies of the Holy Spirit* emerges not merely as a devotional manual but as a work shaped by—and responding to—the tensions of its age. His articulation of the second blessing, his emphasis on the Spirit’s indwelling presence, and his call for a distinctly “Chinese Pentecost” reflect a broader search for spiritual vitality capable of sustaining Christian identity in a period marked by moral anxiety and national crisis. At the same time, the treatise disseminated the Higher Life or Keswick tradition in a form accessible to a broad lay readership.⁶² Cheng adopted plain language and a devotional format to guide believers into what he understood as passive sanctification through surrender to the Spirit. His reliance on writers such as Ruth Paxson (1889–1949), F. B. Meyer (1847–1929), William Arthur (1819–1901), and Andrew Murray (1828–1917) demonstrates how deeply his pneumatology was shaped by modern Anglo-American Evangelical currents, even as he sought to form a Chinese theology. Cheng’s refusal to denounce Pentecostal expressions—unlike contemporaries such as Wang Mingdao—further illustrates the diversity of conservative Chinese Christian approaches to spiri-

60. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 86. On preaching with the Spirit’s power, see Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 87–88.

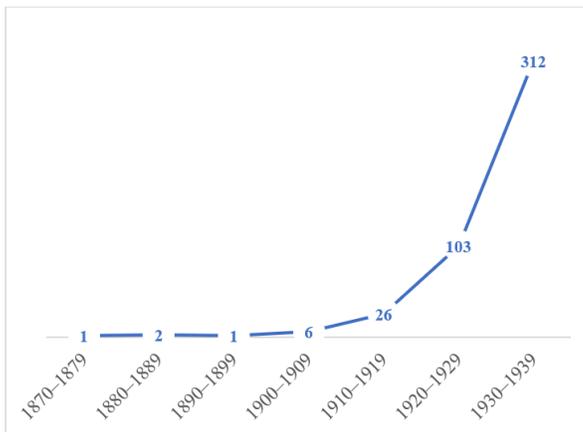
61. Cheng, *Studies of the Holy Spirit*, 90.

62. See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism; Holiness*; Percy, *Words, Wonders, and Power*.

tual experience during this period. Yet what ultimately distinguishes Cheng’s pneumatology is not doctrinal novelty, but its functional role: it offered Chinese Christians a framework for sustaining faith, moral agency, and collective hope amid national crises. His theology of the Holy Spirit was thus neither purely doctrinal nor merely devotional; it was a historically situated response to the spiritual and social instability of his age, one that sought to form believers capable of embodying Christ’s life in the world and contributing to the building of a new Chinese society. In revealing the interplay between imported Evangelical spirituality and local historical pressures, Cheng’s pneumatology stands as an example of how Christian theology in Republican China could be simultaneously contextual, pragmatic, and spiritually transformative.

Appendix 1

Occurrences of “Holy Spirit” in Chinese Periodicals from 1870 to 1939.



Appendix 2

Biblical Texts Used in Cheng's *Studies of the Holy Spirit*.

Introduction	Isa 64:1	Day 15	Acts 2:5–7, 12
Day 1	Ezek 37:1–10	Day 16	Acts 2:4, 11
Day 2	John 14:17	Day 17	1 Cor 14:14–15
Day 3	John 14:16	Day 18	1 Cor 12:28–30
Day 4	John 14:16–17	Day 19	1 Cor 12:30–13:1
Day 5	Rom 8:9	Day 20	Rom 8:9
Day 6	John 14:26	Day 21	Rom 7:18–24
Day 7	John 15:26–27	Excursus 3	John 7:37–39
Excursus 1	Acts 19:1–7	Day 22	Rom 8:11
Day 8	Acts 1:8–9	Day 23	Rom 1:12–13; Luke 4:1
Day 9	Acts 2:1–4	Day 24	Matt 4:2–10
Day 10	John 7:37–39	Day 25	Luke 4:14–15
Day 11	Zech 14:8–9	Day 26	Acts 2:14–16
Day 12	Acts 1:14	Day 27	Gal 5:22–23
Day 13	Acts 2:3	Day 28	Luke 10:21
Day 14	Acts 4:29–31	Day 29	Acts 13:1–4
Excursus 2	Eph 5:18	Day 30	Acts 10:34–35

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